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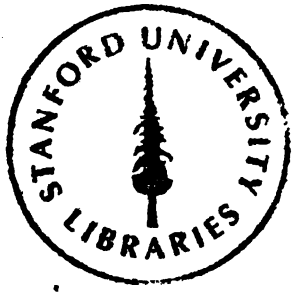
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THE EFFICACY

OF

A MOTHER'S PRAYERS;

ILLUSTRATED IN

THE CONVERSION AND LABORS

OF

AUGUSTINE, BISHOP OF HIPPO.

A NARRATIVE,

DELIVERED IN THE

CHAPEL OF THE INSTITUTE AT FLUSHING, L. I.

"Si mater non orasset Augustinus non prædicasset."

PUBLISHED BY, AND FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE HEBER (MISSIONARY) SOCIETY OF THE INSTITUTE.

New-York:

PRINTED AT THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL PRESS.

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Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1833, by William Augustus Muhlenberg, in the office of the Clerk of the Southern District of New-York.

E. CURTIS BROWN, PRINT.

CORRESPONDENCE.

Flushing Institute, February 28, 1833.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

The undersigned have the honor of communicating to you the following extract from the minutes of a late meeting of the Board of Managers of the Heber (Auxiliary Missionary) Society of the Institute.

It having been suggested by the Rev. Mr. Muhlenberg, that the narrative of the youth and conversion of St. Augustine lately read by the Rev. Mr. Seabury in the chapel of the Institute, would form an interesting and highly useful tract, the publication of which would add to the funds of the Society; it was on motion,

Resolved, That the Rev. Mr. Seabury be respectfully requested to furnish the Board with a copy of the said narrative for publication.

LIBERTUS VAN BOKKELEN,
H. M. SHEAFF, } *Committee.*

Rev. SAMUEL SEABURY.

YOUNG GENTLEMEN,

I have received your note requesting a copy of the narrative lately delivered in the Chapel for publication.

It is a matter of surprise that some popular account of Augustine is not already before the public. The incidents of his early life, the piety of his mother, the peculiar discipline to which he was subjected, and the

happy influence which he ultimately exercised on his own and subsequent times, are sufficient to render a narrative interesting and useful, with whatever want of taste or ability it may be written.

Under these impressions, the manuscript which was hastily drawn up for the improvement of yourselves and your associates, is now cheerfully placed at your disposal. At the instance of the friend at whose suggestion your Society have requested the narrative, and without whose sanction it would not be published, I have broken it into chapters, and continued it so as to answer the end indicated in the title.

That the tract may do good, and that by the sale of it your Society may realize their laudable hopes of aiding the Missionary cause, is the prayer,

Gentlemen,

Of your Friend,

SAMUEL SEABURY.

To

L. VAN BOKKELEN, } *Committee.*
H. M. SHEAFF, }

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THE EFFICACY

OF

A MOTHER'S PRAYERS.

CHAPTER I.

Birth of Augustine — Character of his parents — Early impressions of religion — Education — Baptism of his mother — Goes to Carthage — Death of his father.

AUGUSTINE,* Bishop of Hippo, was born at Tagaste, a small town of Numidia, on the 13th November, A. D. 354. His father, whose name was Patricius, was a freedman, in poor circumstances, and rather below the middle class of society. He was a Pagan, a man of impetuous temper, and of a free way of living; but of a generous spirit, attached to his son, and ambitious to secure for him the riches and honors of the world. His mother,

* The subject of the following narrative must not be confounded with another of the same name, who was despatched toward the end of the sixth century, by Gregory I., to convert the English Saxons, under Ethelbert, to Christianity.

though not wanting in intelligence, was chiefly distinguished for the amiableness of her character, and the keenness of her native sensibilities. At the time of Augustine's birth, she was not a woman of decided piety. She was, however, favorably disposed to religion, and not ignorant of the truths of the Christian faith. Her parents were nominally Christian, but she used to attribute her religious impressions, under GOD, not so much to them, as to the affectionate instructions of an aged and infirm female, who was a domestic in her father's family. Monica, for that was the name of Augustine's mother, was anxious that her son should possess the piety which, though she had not, in the full sense, attained to it, she esteemed as the pearl of great price: and she, accordingly, endeavored to imbue his infant mind with the spirit and the truth of JESUS. The son, even in infancy, gave promise of future greatness. His feelings were ardent: and there appeared occasional gleams of that intellectual splendor which afterward commanded the admiration of the world.

Such a mind, it may well be supposed, was susceptible of serious impressions. But something more than sensibility to religion is necessary to constitute religious character: and Monica early discovered that there was a wide difference between teaching her child Christian truth, and giving him Christian dispositions. The warmth of his temper and the vivacity of his spirits, often betrayed him into sinful excesses, which the mother in vain attempted to correct, while Patricius was accustomed to hail them as the indications of a lively genius. Early in life, however, an event happened, calculated to give consistency to the yielding elements of youthful piety. He was visited with a dangerous illness: and, while suffering under its ravages, strong convictions of sinfulness and of the necessity of pardon through the Saviour, seized upon his mind. He earnestly desired to be baptized, and preparations were accordingly made to administer the sacrament. But a favorable change suddenly occuring in his disease, his baptism, in conformity with a prevalent error of

his age, was injudiciously deferred, and he attached himself to the Church merely as a catechumen. This delay of baptism he afterward regretted: "How much better for me," he exclaims, "had I been in early life initiated into the fold of CHRIST!"—a circumstance the more worthy of notice, as suggesting a probable cause of those peculiar opinions on the efficacy of the Christian sacraments, which are generally deemed inconsistent with the theological system, which, in his later years, he substantially embraced.

It is probable, that if these serious impressions had been followed up; if he had been sheltered from the pollutions of the world, placed in circumstances favorable to virtue and piety, and subjected to a wholesome scriptural discipline, he would have been confirmed in good principles, and spared much of his subsequent unhappiness. But after his recovery he left his home, the virtuous asylum of youth, and repaired to a public school; and so exchanged the vigilant and solicitous care of his mother, for the intercourse of frivolous and licentious companions, and the

loose principles of a Pagan teacher. Here his pious resolutions were broken; he gave freer range to his sinful propensities, and began very soon to sow the seeds of late and bitter repentance. To gratify his own gluttony, or indulge his generosity toward his comrades, he used to pilfer at home. The desire of victory often spurred him on, to take unfair advantages in his juvenile sports. Those, who should have been the guardians of his morals, were at no pains to secure his confidence, and thus naturally became the objects of distrust. Distrust led to deception; and deception, growing into habit, engendered innumerable falsehoods. In later life, Augustine became too well acquainted with human nature, and the purity of the law of GOD, to resolve these faults into the innocent effervescence of buoyant spirits, or disguise their turpitude under the equivocal plea of youthful frailty. He justly traced their origin to the same evil heart of unbelief, from which in riper years flow all the bitter waters of the guilt and misery of life. "Change the scene," he says,

"from boys with their nuts and balls, to men with their estates and kingdoms, and you behold the workings of the same corruption followed by severer, though analogous, punishments."

Not only in the range of his amusements, but in the conduct of his studies, the young Augustine was exposed to an unkindly influence. His teachers were Heathens. They did not seek to instil into his mind the fear of God. They did not habituate him to govern his actions by the dictates of conscience. They knew but little and cared less for the holier motives of the Christian life. They stimulated his talents by intemperate appeals to his sense of shame and honor. They imbittered his spirit with the taunts of disgrace, or intoxicated it with excessive and ill-timed infusions of worldly praise. Nor in recounting the dangers of his soul, must the blighting influence of Heathen literature be forgotten. He was permitted, he tells us, to study the wanderings of Æneas and forget his own, and to deplore the self-murder of Dido, without reflecting on the death of his

own soul alienated from God. In short, Augustine was educated, not for heaven, but for the world. There he found his models, thence he derived his principles, thither he shaped his course. Thus the systematic discipline, which should have encouraged the feeble efforts of virtuous resolution, until they were consolidated into habit, served to strengthen the tendencies of native corruption: and the child was regularly trained to forge the chains of sin, with which the man should be bound. Alas! that we must turn from this picture of a Pagan gymnasium, to find its too faithful transcript in the literary institutions of a Christian land.

The school to which we have alluded, and at which Augustine was grounded in the rudiments of learning, was at Madaura, a city of some note in the neighborhood of Tagaste. At the age of sixteen, he bade adieu to Madaura, and spent a year in vacation from study under his father's roof. A lad of his parts must have made, at this time, great proficiency in his studies. He tells us,

that he was averse to Greek and the Mathematics, but passionately fond of the Latin classics. It is the aim, however, of this rapid sketch, not to mark the progress of his literary career, but to trace the developments of his moral character. At this early period he had become a prey to that curse of unguarded youth, sensuality. He was a slave to his lusts. More than this cannot be said, as the very nature of the vice forbids an exposure of its loathsome details. During the year's vacation, he gave loose to his passions, and became wild and licentious. His father, a man of lax principles and jovial temper, instead of checking him in his mad career, smiled at what he regarded as the harmless sallies of youth, and the bright dawnings of manhood. He sometimes expressed his delight to Monica. Her bosom had never cordially responded to such congratulations; but now whatever bond of worldly sympathy had remained between them, was riven asunder. For, at this time, the religious impressions of her early years had powerfully revived: she had become decidedly

pious, and, by baptism, had publicly assumed the obligations of Christianity. Oh! how did her heart sink within her as she beheld the rampant passions and unbridled excesses of her licentious child! Bitter indeed was her cup to behold the two dearest objects of her affection on earth unconverted to the truth, and confirming, and instigating one another in the principles and works of darkness! For Patricius, though a catechumen by profession, was a stranger to vital piety. Often and affectionately did Monica remonstrate with her son on the folly and wickedness of his conduct; and fervent and constant were her petitions for him at the throne of grace. Augustine had naturally an affectionate heart, but alas! the voice of filial affection was now hushed in the din of worldly frivolity. In the silly affectation of a manly spirit, a common but unamiable trait of youthful character, he piqued himself on regarding with contemptuous indifference, the faithful expostulations of a conscientious and intelligent mother. Her voice, or rather, to use his own expression, the

voice of God in her, he despised, and thought it to be only the voice of a woman. He now enjoyed what the sanguine youth covets as freedom: that is to say, he was a base and dishonest slave of the world. "So blinded was I," he says, "that I should have blushed to be thought less wicked than my companions, and even invented false stories of my sinful exploits to obtain their commendation." "My father," he adds, "thought little of God and much of his son in vain expectations. Thus I made progress in vice, and shut up myself in the darkness of sin, so as to bar up against myself the admission of divine truth."

Ambitious for the future eminence of his son, Patricius was anxious that he should enjoy, in the cultivation of his rare talents, the highest facilities of his age and country. To this end he determined to send him to Carthage; a privilege to which his station in life hardly entitled him to aspire, and which his straitened circumstances ill qualified him to afford. Augustine, accordingly, was sent thither, at the expiration of his six-

teenth year. "I came to Carthage," he says, "surrounded by flagitious lusts:" and, as might be expected, he plunged at once into the whirpool of dissipation. His studies received a portion of his time; for he was naturally greedy of applause, and he sought to distinguish himself in the forum. But the theatre and the public games were his favorite and constant resort. He had been at Carthage, however, scarcely a year, when this round of worldly pleasure received a melancholy interruption. He was called on to lament the death of his father. Whether he returned home to witness the dying scene, we are not informed; but on a young mind of such extraordinary sensibility, we cannot doubt that the event made a most painful, and for the time, probably, a salutary impression. His mother enjoyed a consolation, in this bereavement, in which, at the time, her son could not participate. The amiable entreaties and pious intercessions of Monica had triumphed, at length, over the stubborn heart of Patricius: and, for some time before his death, he had

given gratifying evidence of Christian character, and been admitted to the 'laver of regeneration.' The mother, having resigned to God the husband whom she had been the instrument of restoring to his image, now clung more closely than ever to her son, the chief surviving object of her earthly solicitude. She fully appreciated, perhaps, as Augustine himself intimates, she overrated the advantages of literary education; and, with a noble disinterestedness, in order to secure them to her son, sacrificed all but the bare necessaries of life. At her expense he continued, for two or three years longer, to pursue his studies at Carthage. As he grew older he became more sober; but though visited with severe compunctions of conscience, and dreadful misgivings on the subject of religion, so far was he from exhibiting the fruits of substantial piety, that he did not even renounce the grosser habits of sensual indulgence. His social dispositions and brilliant imagination gained for him the company of those, whom the world terms, friends. But these were merely

the links of the chain with which Satan was seeking to bind him to his triumphal car. True friends, who sought to admonish him of his errors, warn him of his danger and pray for his deliverance, alas! he had none. None? yes, there was one whose bowels yearned towards him with a tender and agonizing solicitude known only to the Christian mother, who weeps over the ruin of a profligate son. Would that the youthful reader could realize the worth of such a friend! Would that he could believe that manhood knows not a purer joy than the ennobling recollection of reverencing the pious solicitude of a mother!

CHAPTER II.

Connexion with the Manichees — Anecdote of his mother — Returns to Tagaste — Death of a friend — Removes to Carthage — Interview with Faustus — Clandestine departure from Carthage.

We must now advert to an event in the history of Augustine, which had no little influence on his subsequent life and character. We allude to his connexion with the Manichees. It is unnecessary to dwell on the peculiarities of this sect, further than to state, that they adulterated the truth of Christ, with admixtures of the Eastern philosophy. They did not reject the New Testament, but connected with the belief of it, a denial of the spirituality of the Deity, and an admission of two independent and coeternal principles, the one good and the other evil. Such views are foreign to our habits of thought; and the most superficial reader is ready to pronounce them absurd. But the mind accustomed to compare the opinions of distant ages, knows that they are as capable of subtile

disquisition and of enlisting mighty energies in their defence, as any of the products of reason, when unsubdued to the spirit and the word of GOD; much more so, we may add, than half the religious theories that have spread their cobweb meshes over the nineteenth century. For the rest, suffice it to say, that the Manichees possessed one practical feature in common with many other heresies which GOD has permitted to exist, as the means of fully trying and developing the character of his people. They contrived under cover of some plausible opinions and the specious pretext of seeking after truth to connect the profession of religion with the sinful indulgence of the world. This was exactly the religion for which Augustine unconsciously longed. His judgment was too solid, and of too practical a mould, to deny the credibility of scriptural truth, and his native sensibilities were too keen not to respond to its call. But the flesh and the world, though they could not drown the voice of conscience, were more than a match for the understanding and the natural heart: and the

tempter availing himself of their aid, decoyed him into his trap by alluring him, with the specious semblance of truth, to justify the sins which he would not abandon. His aspiring intellect delighted to grapple with the bold and daring speculations of the Manichees, and to produce them, as he vainly fancied, in triumphant array with the humiliating doctrines of the Cross. "I sought thee, O my God," he exclaims, "not in spiritual but in carnal speculations." Thus his understanding was kept at bay, his conscience was lulled asleep, the rein was thrown on his carnal appetites, and the unhappy youth, in the flush of vain confidence, was fast riding over the pitfalls of sensuality and perdition. Like many other heretics, too, he had those secret misgivings which impelled him to fortify his errors by increasing the number of their advocates. He eagerly sought to make proselytes, nor did he rest until he had tainted the minds of several of his friends with the corruptions of his own.

To this period must be referred the touching incident which gave occasion

to a saying, that has been since often repeated to animate the hopes and prayers of parental piety. His mother, whose watchful eye still followed him, applied to a celebrated bishop, beseeching him to use his influence to reclaim her erring son. The bishop, though suitably affected by the request, was well enough acquainted with human nature, and with the temper of Augustine's mind, to know that such an attempt, at that time, would be fruitless. "Your son," said he, "is too much elated at present, and carried away with the pleasing novelty of error, to regard arguments; — as appears by the pleasure he takes in puzzling many ignorant persons with his questions. Let him alone; only continue to pray to the LORD for him: he will in the course of his study discover his error." All this did not satisfy the anxious parent. With floods of tears she reiterated her request; when, at last, a little ruffled by her importunity, "Leave me, good woman," he exclaimed, "it is impossible that the child of such tears should perish!"

After he became of age, Augustine left Carthage, and, settling himself in his native village, opened a school for Grammar. Among his associates, at this time, was one to whom he was strongly attached. "There is no true friendship," he observes, "but such as God cements among those who cleave to him by the love shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost." But many circumstances concurred to render this attachment one of peculiar interest. The subjects of it had been companions from infancy; their studies were similar, their tastes congenial; and the sympathies, thence resulting, had been ripened by long and intimate intercourse. By the influence of a superior mind, Augustine had succeeded in seducing his amiable friend from the true faith into the vagaries of the Manichean heresy. Suddenly this young man became dangerously ill. Augustine hurried to his bedside. While he lay senseless of a fever, his friends, complying with a prevalent error, baptized him without his knowledge. Very unexpectedly he began to recover; and Augustine em-

braced the first opportunity to banter him on the baptism which he had unconsciously received. To his great surprise, his friend recoiled from him as an enemy, and promptly requested him to drop the subject. Augustine complied with his wishes; intending to resume the conversation as soon as returning health would allow. But this time never arrived. In the course of a few days his friend relapsed and died. Augustine was overwhelmed with grief. He loved his friend with ardor, and lamented him with poignant anguish. Now he felt the emptiness of worldly joy. Now he saw the rottenness of the foundation on which his hopes were reared. Now he experienced the inefficacy of a false religion. In vain did he attempt to throw his burden on GOD: it returned again on his distracted soul: for as yet he knew not the true GOD revealed to the believer in JESUS CHRIST.

Monica was now in hopes that religion would come in to supply the void in the bosom of her son. But Augustine was a stranger to the home of inward com-

munion. He knew not that every individual, as well as every family, can only be happy by cultivating the peaceful virtues within his own bosom. Instead of guarding this sanctuary from intrusion, he abandoned it, and rushed into the world; there to grasp illusion for reality, and to seek to satisfy the cravings of an immortal nature by the varying excitement of changeful and outward objects. All around him recalled painful recollections; and instead of directing them to a salutary end, he sought to dissipate them by changing the scene. He abruptly left Tagaste, and commenced the exercise of his professional duties anew and under more favorable auspices at Carthage. There his grief was dispelled, and the world resumed its sway. New amusements were courted, new intimacies were contracted. Again was the affectionate mother doomed to weep over the withered buds of promise. But that mother never forsook him, never despaired of him. The wormwood of her anguish was always sweetened by some infusion of divine hope. "For nine years,"

he says, "while I was rolling in the slime of sin, often attempting to rise and still sinking deeper, did she in vigorous hope persist in incessant prayer."

From this time, Augustine continued to reside at Carthage for about six years. How soon his mother followed him does not appear; but we shall find that she was with him toward the close of this period, and probably much before. Thus far, however, her persuasions and prayers were seemingly of no avail, nor do we learn that any thing happened, in this interval, to inspire her with fresh encouragement. He became, indeed, dissatisfied with the doctrines of the Manichees, and openly expressed his feelings, but was exhorted by their leading men to await the arrival of Faustus at Carthage, who, it was said, would resolve all his doubts. Faustus was the great pillar of their sect; a fluent and eloquent speaker, but of superficial attainments; an apt representative of the majority of heretical preachers of this and every age. At length he visited Carthage. Augustine eagerly sought an interview

with him, and the result was a virtual abandonment of the Manichean heresy. The superficial eloquence that captivated the multitude, was lost on the original and profound mind of Augustine. After this he remained a Manichee in name, but in reality relapsed into a dreary skepticism. The truth is, the error had lost its novelty, and his vanity could no longer be gratified by the ingenious defence of its absurdities.

We pass on from this incident, instructive as it is, to relate an action which has left, perhaps, a deeper stain on the memory of Augustine, than any single circumstance in his history. For some reasons not distinctly known, he became dissatisfied with his residence at Carthage. Some have ascribed his disgust to the insolence of his pupils. He talks, however, of the madness of one class of citizens, and the friendship of another: probably, therefore, as his talents would not permit him to remain in obscurity, he had taken an active share in public life, and become involved in the disquietudes which are often consequent upon

such a step. But whatever may have been the reason, he determined to leave Carthage; and Rome, the mistress of the world, now beckoned him to a nobler theatre of ambition. But the affection of his mother presented an obstacle not easily to be overcome. To gain her consent to his departure was impossible; and, probably, he thought it no less so to withstand her entreaties to remain. In this strait he resolved to practise on her a deliberate deception. But who, at such a time, could lull to sleep the suspicions of maternal love? What secrecy of preparation could elude the vigilance of a mother's eye? She hovered about his path: and, as he was on the point of absconding, she sprung toward him and with palpitating heart pressed closely to his side. "My son!" she exclaimed, "what means this mysterious conduct? Is it possible? Is that vessel ———?" "Fear not, mother," interrupted Augustine. "A friend is embarking on a distant voyage: I propose to accompany him without the harbor

and return." Her son had never deceived her, and Monica would not doubt his word. But a voice within whispered her that all was not right, and, with anxious misgivings, she insisted on accompanying him to the shore. Near the point of embarkation was an oratory dedicated to St. Cyprian. Augustine, conducting his mother within, embraced her affectionately, and said, "Remain here, mother, till morning, and then your son will again fold you to his bosom." "God grant it!" said the half-distracted Monica, as she relaxed her grasp, and permitted her son to depart. The feverish disquietude of that night, spent, as her son assures us, in "weeping and praying," we may conceive. But when the morning sun arose, and no vessel was in sight; when not a doubt was left that her son had fled from her for ever; nay, that the son of so many prayers and tears had turned his back on his mother with a lie in his heart, who can describe, who but a heart-broken mother can feel the anguish of her bleeding bosom? She rent the air, he tells us,

with her shrieks and groans. But the frenzy of the mother soon yielded to the piety of the saint. Faith resumed its sway: the wild waves of grief subsided: and the calm sorrow, that now buried itself in the recesses of her bosom, inspired her devotion with a new and holier fervor.

Ungrateful and perfidious wretch! methinks the reader will exclaim. And thus ready are we to fill up the measure of our fathers, and say if we had lived in their days, we had not been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. True, the conduct of Augustine admits of neither excuse nor palliation. But let it not be forgotten, that few men possessed natural affection of so high an order or in so great a degree. At an early period he would have shuddered at the thought, and believed himself utterly incapable of such mingled deception and ingratitude. But as he grew up, the kindlier feelings of his nature were engrossed and vitiated by unworthy objects. Thus his heart was impercepti-

bly estranged from his parent: and the estrangement was increased by the suasions of a piety which he could not reciprocate and which, in proportion as it approved itself to his conscience, was uncongenial to his worldly feelings. So inadequate are the mere sympathies of the natural heart, when uncontrolled by a higher principle, for a pure and permanent attachment! So true is it that the only imperishable bond of union is that Christian charity which is at once equable in its influence and eternal in its essence! In other words, let me assure the mother who peruses these pages, that the heart of her offspring, however it may now warm with the glow of filial affection, is capable of harboring greater perfidy than Augustine's. Let new attractions be presented and new affinities may take place. The attachments of the animal nature may be dissolved by the same law by which they were cemented. Suffer not your son then to rest in natural affection as a sufficient security for filial duty, but invite him daily to the throne

of grace, to implore that charity which never faileth; which will sweeten all the intercourse of life, pouring forth the stream of beneficence, even when disease or poverty or some other vicissitude of worldly fortune, has diverted the current or dried up the fountain of natural sympathy.

CHAPTER III.

Arrives at Rome — Is dangerously ill — Anecdote of Alypius — Removes to Milan — Hears St. Ambrose, and renounces the Manichees — Unexpected meeting at Milan — Is disappointed in obtaining an interview with Ambrose — The state of his mind.

With a clear sky and a fair breeze the vessel, in which Augustine embarked, was soon wafted to the mouth of the Tiber. What were his feelings during the voyage we can learn only from conjecture; but surely after so cruel an act of deception, they could have been little in harmony with the serenity of nature. Arrived in the imperial city, he took up his abode with one of the Manichean fraternity. This sect was divided into classes, the elect and the auditors; of which Augustine belonged to the former and his host to the latter. "My landlord," he tells us, "who had not so much experience as I of the sect, was elevated with their fancies. I checked his sanguine views, and though the intimacy I had contracted with this people made me backward to seek elsewhere for truth,

I was, however, little solicitous to defend the reputation of their tenets." For his own part, it would seem, that, in the pride of intellect, he continued to exercise the vigorous powers of his mind on the abstruse questions of theology. How, he asked, can there be any such thing as a spiritual substance? The most subtile essence of which I can conceive is, after all, material. How can a good being create an evil one? It is impossible: and I must therefore conclude that evil is coeternal with good, and consequently that GOD has no independent existence. Giant as Augustine was in intellectual strength, we are here tempted to exclaim, Poor deluded child! why didst thou not submit thy mind to the teachings of thy Father? Madly persisting in the attempt to discover the hidden counsels of GOD, to what shall we compare him but to a maniac, throwing his bucket into the ocean, and hoping, at each successive draught, to lay open the unfathomable abyss below!

He had not been long at Rome, when a violent fever brought him to the verge

of the grave. But his mind was now too confirmed in impiety to be profited by such discipline. He had derided the medicine of human misery until he had despaired of experiencing its efficacy. He rested in his own strength and set death at defiance. "Whither must I have gone," he exclaims, in reverting afterward to this fearful crisis of his life, "whither must I have gone, had I at that time departed hence, but to the fire and torments worthy of my deeds?" "How my mother," he subjoins, "whose affection, both natural and spiritual, toward me was so great, would have borne such a stroke, I cannot conceive." Monica was indeed ignorant of his situation: but though absent in the body, he was still present to her soul. She became one with her son by looking up to the unity in which both were created and redeemed, and by imploring the influences by which both might, in the same unity, be sanctified. "Morning and evening," he tells us, "she frequented the church to hear the word of God and to pray; and the salvation of her son was the

constant burden of her supplication." With such perseverance was the grace of prayer, that was dispensed to the mother, exerted in behalf of the son. Reader! dost thou so well understand the laws of spirit as to deny, in the face of the word of God, that the light, thus derived from the Sun of Righteousness, and steadily reflected toward a wandering spirit, was a means of restoring that spirit to the order that it had violated? was at least one of the counter attractions by which it was ultimately adjusted and retained in the orb in which it was destined, through eternity, to revolve around the centre of spiritual influence?

It may be mentioned as an evidence of the colloquial powers and social character of Augustine, and of the ardor of his attachments, that Nebridius, a gentleman of property and of liberal education, left Carthage, and took up his residence at Rome, in order to enjoy the society of his friend. At Rome, also, to his agreeable surprise, he fell in with Alypius, who had been a pupil of his at Tagaste and Carthage, and who was

now attending the Roman schools with the view of qualifying himself for the legal profession. While he remained here, these were his bosom friends. Nebridius was a man of the greater mind, and capable of influencing Augustine against some of the errors which he had espoused, and, in particular, of weaning him from Astrology, to which, in common with many great men of more enlightened ages, he was, at one time, addicted. Alypius possessed a more pliable character, and though not wanting in talents, was distinguished rather for the warmth of his passions than the vigor of his mind. In one of his rhetorical lectures at Carthage, Augustine abruptly burst out into an eloquent invective against the Circensian games. Alypius, at this time one of their most reckless votaries, chanced to be present. The eloquence which was intended as a general censure, came home to Alypius as a personal reproof. From that time he resolved to abandon the bewitching but destructive amusement. He waited on Augustine, announced to him the intention and the

cause of it. Henceforward, Augustine numbered him amongst his most intimate friends: and, under such auspices, no wonder that Alypius soon after became a proselyte of the Manichees. And here I cannot forbear to mention an anecdote that illustrates the manners of the Augustan age, and, by contrast, the benign influence of Christianity on the morals of our own. When Alypius went to Rome, he had resolved, for fear of being enticed from his studies, never to attend the exhibition of the gladiators, a diversion of which he had been passionately fond. Some of his dissipated associates seized him one night, in a wild freak, and forcibly hurried him to the spot. Alypius, still adhering to the spirit of his vow, determined, after he had entered the theatre, to remain with his eyes shut. For awhile he adhered to his resolution; "till, on a certain occasion, when the whole house rang with shouting, he opened his eyes to see what was the matter. Beholding a gladiator wounded, at the sight of the blood he was inebriated with the sanguinary pleasure. He gazed,

he shouted, he was inflamed, and carried away with him the madness which stimulated him to repeat his visits. He became enamored of the sports, even more than those who had dragged him thither;" frequented them himself, and seduced others to accompany him. Such is the weakness of human resolution. But Alypius had yet to learn that he must distrust his own strength, and look to Him who is mighty to save. He afterward became an active minister of CHRIST, and bishop of his native town, Tagaste. Here he continued to the day of his death, in habits of fraternal intercourse with his friend, and their names are associated in the history of the Pelagian controversy.

Augustine was discontented at Rome; and, having spent about a year in sharing its luxuries and contemplating its magnificence, he resolved to leave it. Providence had so ordered it, that about this time application was made to Symmachus, the prefect of Rome, to nominate a professor to the chair of rhetoric at Milan, and Augustine, through the

influence of his Manichean friends, succeeded in obtaining the honor. Thither he repaired, accompanied by Nebridius and Alypius, who shared, to a considerable extent, his religious perplexities, as well as his friendship. The Church at Milan was at this time rejoicing in the services of Ambrose, a man who was much older than Augustine, resembling him in the ardor of his affections, and the variety of his learning, and but little his inferior in intellectual energy. Augustine lost no time in waiting on Ambrose. He approached him not as a teacher of divine truth, but as a scholar of literary eminence. He was won, however, by the unaffected simplicity and paternal kindness of his manners. He attended his lectures, not to be edified by their matter, but to criticise the style and manner of the preacher, and to see how far fame had done justice to his eloquence. Charmed at first with their language, he came, by degrees, to meditate on their doctrine. Salvation, he tells us, is far from sinners, such as he then was; and yet, he adds, "I was

gradually approaching it and knew it not." His objections against the Scriptures vanished before the luminous and comprehensive expositions of Ambrose; and he acknowledged that he had reason to rebuke himself for the disparaging opinions of them which he had hastily formed. He now became more than ever disgusted with the Manichees, and, convinced of the fallacy and dangerous tendency of their doctrines, he formally renounced their connexion, and again professed himself a catechumen in the orthodox portion of the Church. But still was he a stranger to the life-giving doctrines of the Gospel. Again he revolved in his mind the various systems of philosophy, and again convinced of their absurdity, and their inadequateness to satisfy the spiritual wants of man, he fell back on himself in a state of doubt and despondency.

One day at Milan, and probably while lingering round the spot to which he had been chained by the eloquence of Ambrose, he was suddenly startled by a well-known voice, and had hardly time

to recover from his surprise, before he found himself in the arms of his mother. The result of the inquiries which she had made had enabled her to trace him through his changes of residence, and she had followed him by sea and land; her affection inducing her to brave all dangers, and her piety supporting her under every trial. The scene which followed, of mutual expressions of love, mingled with tender reproaches on the one hand, and prayers for forgiveness on the other, and with tears of joy for both, may well be imagined. As soon as the tumult of rapture had subsided, the spiritual interests of her son were the object of the mother's solicitous inquiries. In few words Augustine explained to her the state of his mind. Monica was too enlightened a Christian, not to perceive that the dawn of the day of grace had already appeared. "I believe in CHRIST," she replied, "that before I leave this world, I shall see you a sound believer." Who does not respect the constancy of her faith? Who would not have been touched by her intercessions, when with

uplifted hands and streaming eyes, she fell on her knees and besought God to perfect the good work which he had begun? Truly it is not merely natural sentiment that is moved; it is not merely the Christian oracles that declare it; philosophy herself, if we *will* dearly purchase of her the truth which we might accept for nothing as the gift of God, assures us, that all the relations of spiritual entity would be severed, that its various parts (so to speak) would recede from and repel one another, if the fervent and ceaseless prayers of a mother, for the spiritual welfare of her son, could ascend to the Father of spirits, with as little effect as words spoken to the winds.

Every Lord's day now found the mother and son regular attendants on the ministry of Ambrose. Monica looked up to the bishop with sentiments of esteem and veneration, as the delegated messenger of God, and the faithful dispenser of his oracles. But, when she regarded him as the deliverer of her son from the shackles of the Manichees, the ardor of

her attachment was inflamed beyond measure. Ambrose in turn was charmed with the sweetness of her dispositions, the benevolence of her actions, and the fervor of her piety: and often in the course of his preaching would he break out in commendation of her, and congratulate Augustine on the possession of such a mother. "Little did he know," says Augustine, "what sort of a son she had; one who doubted of religion; who did not groan to God in prayer, and who was intent only on studies and restless in investigations." Ambrose was, in effect, a stranger to Augustine. "He knew not," says he, "the fluctuations of my soul, nor the dangerous pit in which I was enslaved." And it may help us to form an idea of the arduous duties of a bishop in those days when we learn that Augustine, whose modesty (as his historian suggests) may have prevented him from soliciting a formal interview with the bishop, was never able to obtain from him a conference in which he could unbosom the distresses of his soul. The little time in which the bishop could

escape from the crowds of persons whose necessities he relieved, and whose differences, according to the primitive usage of the Church, it was his delicate task to adjust, barely sufficed for the refreshment of his body with food, or his mind with reading.

Augustine was at this time so far subdued to the truth, as sincerely to desire a life of holiness. He frequently resorted to the church, not only, as formerly, to listen to the eloquence of the preacher, but with the purer intention of lifting up his heart to GOD in prayer. But as yet religion was an occasional and evanescent feeling, rather than a permanent and operative principle. He felt continually the need of a deeper and more radical change: yet still did he retain his secular employments; still did he covet the wealth and applause of the world; nor could he bring himself to an entire abandonment of sensual gratifications. The more, however, he saw of the world, the more convinced was he of the hollowness of its professions, and the certainty of its disappointments. Even when apparently

the most elated with prosperity, he was at heart disgusted with life. On one occasion, in particular, when about to pronounce before the emperor a panegyric replete with fulsome adulation, while his friends were congratulating him on the honor, stung with the falsehood of what he was about to utter, he pointed to a sot, excited by a momentary spirit of hilarity, and exclaimed, "Behold the goal of my ambition! at best the end of my crooked courses is to be a few hours of animal gratification!" A natural and cutting reflection for any of the votaries of pleasure; but the self-reproaches of such a mind as Augustine's must have been peculiarly severe. Often did he resolve to consecrate a stated portion of his time to the practical duties of religion. But procrastination, with her secret and deadly opiates, had lulled him into a stupor: months rolled away, while each succeeding day brought its business to engross and its pleasures to captivate. He discharged the duties of his profession; attended the levees of the great; indulged in the amusements

of the age under the name of relaxation, and — neglected his soul.

To follow him through all the tortuous mazes of his intellectual course, would be alike tedious and unprofitable. One by one the bars of his prison were rent asunder: and his mind became more fortified with the proofs of the divine origin and inspiration of the Scriptures. His infidelity, indeed, had never been exclusively the offspring either of speculation or of feeling. It was the combined opposition of the understanding and the heart: or rather, we may say, that he was unconsciously resolved, with all his might to impugn, and with all the lubricity of an ingenious and versatile mind, to elude the grasp of every argument that would compel him to obey the moral and spiritual requirements of the Gospel. The credibility of scriptural truth presented itself to his mind, as to the minds of thinking inquirers in general, as a matter of reason and a matter of fact. Considering the subject abstractly, his chief difficulty, as we have seen, respected the origin of evil: and it is sufficient to

state, as the result of his mature deliberations, that he arrived at a view which, though by no means a full resolution of the question, is probably the nearest approximation to it which human reason can make. "Evil," he tells us, "has no positive existence: if it were a substance like all the other creatures of GOD it would be good: it is a privative; a want of agreement, and a confusion in the relations, of things in themselves good." In other words, evil is a violation of order. But Augustine perceived the fallacy of this mode of investigation: and, with a spirit in advance of his age, he turned his attention to the matter of fact, and bent all his force to the inquiry whether the Scriptures were or were not the word of GOD. Formerly, in common with many disguised infidels of the present day, he had, by a verbal equivocation, professedly admitted while he practically denied the inspiration of the Scriptures; adopting the Pantheistic notion, which, in modern times, we are used to ascribe to Spinoza, but which in fact is one of the progeny of the old Greek philosophy,

and was in Augustine's day, a favorite tenet of the Manichees, that God and the universe are the same thing: and consequently, that the Scriptures may be said to be inspired, though in the same sense in which any other book, or even a forest or mountain is inspired. On reviewing the subject, however, in his maturer years, he came to a different conclusion: and the chain of reasoning by which he was led to it, but which it does not comport with the brevity of the present work to trace, is evidence of an acute and discriminating mind. The argument which had most weight with him, is the same by which babes and sucklings are drawn into the kingdom of Christ, and which, after all, has been the refuge and the solace of the greatest minds, especially when, by the discipline of life, their affections have ripened into piety, and the waywardness of speculation has sobered down into the calmness of reflection. It is the sublimity and the simplicity of evangelical truth: on the one hand, its worthiness of God; on the other, its entire adaptation to the wants of man.

But even this view in the present state of Augustine's mind was theoretical rather than practical. It was more the perception of what the effect of the Gospel might be, than the conscious experience of what it actually was. There was nothing like it, he tells us, in the Heathen philosophy. The nearest approach which he found to it was in the writings of Plato; and the perusal of them, as he intimates, served, in some degree, to prepare his mind for the reception of the pure and scriptural theology. A mind like his, however, needed the warmth as well as the light of truth. But the Platonic books, he tells us, had nothing of the tears of confession, the sacrifice of a troubled spirit, a broken and contrite heart, the earnest of the Holy Spirit, and the cup of redemption. None there hears *Come unto me all ye that labor and I will give you rest.* It is one thing, he beautifully adds, to see a land of peace at a distance, with no practicability of reaching it, and another to pursue the right road toward it under

the care of the heavenly commander who made the road for your use.

The reader who has thus far followed the subject of this narrative, will perceive that events are now hastening to the crisis, which it will be the object of the next chapter to disclose. The clouds of his spiritual horizon are beginning to dissipate. He has seen and embraced the truth; and the truth has begun to operate. "His desires," he tells us, "were no longer inflamed with the hopes of honor and money, and he was displeased with the servitude of the world." In other words, he had been penetrated with a genuine sorrow for sin; and was beginning in sincerity to put up the aspirations that his heart and life might be purified from its stains. The seed had germinated: the vine had sprung up and had crept along for some distance on the surface: and we shall presently have the satisfaction of seeing it suddenly shoot up and twine around the tree of life.

CHAPTER IV.

Leaves Milan — Interview with Simplician — The conversion of Victorinus — State of the Church at Milan — His conversion — Visit to his mother — Dismisses his pupils — His Baptism — Death of Monica.

The nearer Augustine approached to the hour of decided conversion, the fiercer were the assaults of Satan, and the more tempestuous were the billows of his turbulent soul. How long he retained his professorship at Milan is uncertain; but it would seem, from his own account, that previously to the time of which we are now speaking, he had left the city and opened a school for rhetoric in the country. Hence he had not access to the counsels of Ambrose or his mother; and, in this destitution, feeling more than ever the need of a spiritual guide, he anxiously cast his eyes about him for succor. There resided in his neighborhood Simplician, a Christian of distinguished piety and advanced age. He had been the spiritual father of Ambrose, whom he afterward succeeded in

the episcopate, and who, while he lived, cherished for him the affectionate reverence of a son. To him Augustine had recourse and unbosomed all his griefs. The venerable Christian heard his tale with the deepest interest; entered most cordially into his feelings; gave him a lucid exposition of scriptural truth, and encouraged him to an immediate and public avowal of the faith of JESUS. Then, for his further encouragement, he gave him a minute account of the conversion of Victorinus, a distinguished philosopher of the age, who had been long looked up to by the Heathen as one of the bulwarks of their religion, against the encroachments of Christianity, but who in the latter part of his life had embraced the Christian scheme in preference to any of the philosophical systems with which he had been conversant.*

* As the conversion of Victorinus is in itself a remarkable manifestation of divine grace, and throws light on the state of the Church at the time when it happened, the reader, it is presumed, will be gratified with Augustine's account of it in the able translation of Milner:

"He was a man of great learning, far advanced in life, well skilled in all liberal knowledge; he had read, criticised, and illus-

This event occurred under Julian the Apostate: and Simplician added, that, on his profession of Christianity, Victorinus was obliged by law to abandon his professorship, a sacrifice which he cheerfully made. The narrative was not lost on Augustine. He admired the noble

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trated many philosophers; he had taught many illustrious senators; had been honored by a statue erected in the Roman forum, as a reward of his magisterial labors; and even to his old age was a worshipper of idols, and a partaker of all the rites, to which almost the whole Roman nobility at that time were addicted; moreover, he had, many years, defended the monstrous and absurd objects of worship to which the common people had been accustomed. But now, he was not ashamed to become a child of thy CHRIST, an infant of thy fountain, with his neck subjected to the yoke of humility, and his forehead subdued to the reproach of the cross. O LORD, thou who bowedst the heavens and camest down, who touched the mountains and they smoked, by what means didst thou insinuate thyself into his heart! He read, as Simplician told me, the holy Scripture, and studiously investigated all Christian literature, and told my instructer, not openly, but in secrecy as to a friend, "Know that I am already a Christian." He answered, "I shall not believe it, nor rank you among Christians, till I see you in the Church of CHRIST." But he smiling answered, "Do walls then make Christians?" This kind of dialogue was frequently repeated between them. For Victorinus feared to offend his friends, men of rank and dignity, and he dreaded the loss of reputation. But after that by further studying of the word and by secret prayer he had acquired more strength, and feared to be denied by CHRIST before the angels, if he denied him before men, and felt himself condemned for being ashamed of Christian sacraments, though he had not been ashamed of demon-worship, he blushed at his

example, and resolved, at the moment, to imitate it, and surrender voluntarily the same employment, which Victorinus had been forbidden to exercise. At that time the amalgamation between the Church and the world, which afterward insidiously increased, until Christianity was merged in the maxims of worldly

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false modesty, and suddenly said to Simplician, "Let us go to the Church, I wish to be made a Christian." The venerable old saint, unable to contain his joy, went with him, when he was imbued with the first sacraments of instruction. Not long after he gave in his name that he might have the benefit of Christian baptism. Rome was astonished, the Church rejoiced. The proud saw and were indignant, and gnashed with their teeth and pined away; but the LORD his GOD was the hope of thy servant, and he no longer regarded lying vanities. At length, when the season came on of professing his belief, which profession is usually at Rome, from a high place in the sight of the faithful, in a certain form of words gotten by heart, by those who are to partake of the grace in baptism, an offer was made by the presbyters to Victorinus, that he should repeat them more secretly, as was the custom for some who were likely to be disturbed through bashfulness. But he chose rather to profess his religion in the sight of the holy multitude; for there was no salvation in rhetoric, yet he had publicly professed it. When he mounted the pulpit to repeat, with a voice of congratulation, as many as knew him resounded his name; and who did not know him? Amidst the general joy, the sound, though checked with decent reverence, went around, 'Victorinus, Victorinus.' They exulted at the sudden sight of him, and were as suddenly silent, that they might hear him. He pronounced the form of words with an excellent confidence, and all wished to hold him in their bosom, and they actually did so in love and joy."

policy, had scarcely begun. The Church for the most part continued to be what its founder originally designed, and what its best friends are ever anxious to render it, "a city set upon a hill;" distinguished from the world by the holiness of its members. Augustine therefore understood that Christian obligations would admit of no compromise with the fashions and pursuits of the age; that not only his amusements, but even his secular employment, connecting him as it did with heathen society, must be abandoned. Such a sacrifice he knew to be necessary to his peace of conscience: but like all those who would be "delivered, through JESUS CHRIST, from the body of death," he felt "another law in his members warring against the law of his mind." "The two wills," he says, "the old and the new, the flesh and the spirit, contended within me, and between them tore my very soul."

The presence of his mother at this time would have rendered unnecessary his application to Simplician: and, had she known the situation of his mind, she

probably would have been with him to guide him with her spiritual counsel. But Monica, though she never despaired of the conversion of her son, had long since given over the attempt to influence his religious opinions. She had remained at Milan: wisely judging that the spiritual interests of both would be best promoted if she continued to enjoy the ministrations of Ambrose, by aid of which her piety would be increased, and her prayers for the salvation of her son be rendered more prevailing and more fervent. Another motive induced her to the same decision. The Church at Milan was at this time suffering persecution; and Ambrose was the especial object of the cruelty of the implacable Justina. In this hour of danger the devoted flock, in the true spirit of the primitive Church, gathered around their pastor, determined to accompany him to the stake. Monica, it may well be supposed, was among the foremost in courageous piety; and, it may be doubted, whether even maternal solicitude could have tempted her to desert her Church in the prospect of

martyrdom. Night after night, in company with a holy band of worshippers, did she continue in the temple in unwearied watching and prayer: and thus, while the flame of the mother's devotion was burning in its purest lustre, and her prayers were ascending with sublimest fervor, she was about, though she knew it not, to receive the reward of her piety, and realize the consummation of her highest hopes in the effectual conversion of her son.

When the mind has been long subjected to an accumulation of influences, a mere trifle may serve to turn the scale, and determine it to a new course of conduct. Or to use another illustration, when the spiritual vision has been long clouded with earthly mists, it is quite conceivable that these, in a moment of mental excitement, may be dissipated, and a ray of truth be brought, for the first time, in direct and efficient contact with the soul. Something of this kind we are now to record in the case of Augustine. One day, at his own house, while enjoying the conversation of Aly-

pius, who was spending with him a vacation from his professional pursuits, he received a visit from Politian, their mutual friend and fellow-townsman. After they were seated, Politian, observing a volume on the playtable which was before them, took it up, supposing it to be a work on rhetoric, but found, to his surprise, that it was the epistles of St. Paul. Politian, though a soldier, and at court, was a Christian, and he cordially congratulated Augustine on his taste. This led to various conversation, in the course of which, Politian gave an account of two of his young friends, who had suddenly renounced the world, and consecrated themselves to God in a life of devotion. The narrative awakened in the mind of Augustine feelings, which the conversion of the aged Victorinus, much as it affected him, had failed to inspire. The recollections of early life, of time misspent, of talents abused, disappointed hopes, restless and still unsatisfied ambition, rushed forcibly on his mind. "For twelve years," he said, "I have been seeking wisdom, and I am

still at a distance from joy. For twelve years have I mocked thee, my God, with prayers for chastity and continence, with the impious reservation that thou wouldst for awhile longer defer to grant my petition. For twelve years have I deferred, from day to day, devoting myself to God, under pretence of inquiring after truth. And now I hear of youths who have at once seized the crown around which I have so vainly wandered. "What is this," he exclaimed to Alypius, "what is this which we have heard? Illiterate men rise and seize heaven, while we, with all our learning, are rolling in the filth of sin!" In a state of violent agitation, he caught up the sacred volume before him, and retired to the adjoining garden. Alypius, who, though incapable, from his greater placidity of character, of sympathizing in the uncontrollable perturbations of his friend, yet shared his interest in religion, followed him and took a seat by his side. The soul of Augustine was now tossed on the waves of excited passion. God and the world strove for the mastery. "What will thy

friends say," whispered the arch deceiver. "Throw thyself on GOD," replied a voice from within. The storm of his soul increased, and he withdrew to a short distance that he might privately give expression to his grief. Alypius in amazement, was riveted to the spot; while Augustine prostrated himself beneath a fig-tree, and, with a voice broken by convulsive sobs, exclaimed. "How long, LORD, wilt thou be angry? for ever? How long shall I say to-morrow? Why should not this hour put an end to my slavery?" "Take up and read; take up and read," was repeated frequently in an audible voice. In these words Augustine recognised a voice from heaven. He hurried back to the spot where Alypius was sitting, seized the volume of St. Paul's epistles which he had left there, opened it, and the first passage that struck his eyes was; "Not in rioting and drunkenness; not in chambering and wantonness; not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord JESUS CHRIST, and make not provisions for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof." Immediately all

his doubts vanished: and a delightful serenity overspread his soul, as with a tranquil countenance, he closed the book and handed it to Alypius.

Such, in substance, is Augustine's own account of his conversion, and the writer desires to be understood as stating the fact, without becoming responsible for any theory with which the reader may choose to connect it. He will venture, however, to remark, that, whatever may be thought of its particulars, taken as a whole, it manifests a signal operation of divine grace. The voice which Augustine fancied that he heard, was probably the illusion of an excited imagination; though it is fair to mention that he himself, at the time, combated this idea, and endeavored, in vain, to convince himself that the words had been previously impressed on his mind, and were now recalled by the ordinary process of association. His conviction of its reality, in the judgment of a reader competent to estimate the character of individuals by the standard of the age in which they lived, casts no more suspicion on the

rationality of his piety, than does his belief in Astrology on the vigor of his understanding. Both were in keeping with his times. But whether the words were or were not audibly pronounced, is a question of merely speculative interest: since undoubtedly they were strongly impressed on his mind, and it would ill comport with the genius of our holy religion not to resolve this impression, and its immediate results, into the influence of the Spirit of God. It was gratifying to Augustine, that the doubts of Alypius yielded together with his own. Both dated the commencement of their Christian career from the same hour; and their mutual friendship was thenceforward knit together by the imperishable ties of Christian love.

Augustine was now better capable of appreciating the anxiety of his parent; and in company with Alypius, he set off instantly for Milan to inform her of the eventful change which had occurred in his feelings and prospects. The transports of Monica's joy, as she now greeted her son, a monument of the saving grace

of her LORD, were equalled in excess only by the paroxysm of her grief when she had agonized over the loss of the same son in the oratory of St. Cyprian, on the morning that he had fled from Carthage. Again and again did she listen to the narrative. Again and again as he repeated it, did she alternately clasp her son to her bosom, and fall upon her knees to pour out her devout thanksgiving for his recovery. Before, when she had looked upon her child, nature and grace had put in their separate claims and distracted her heart. But now, with a happy concentration of blissful emotions, she could exult in him as a mother, without trembling for him as a Christian.

Augustine now in good earnest set about altering his course of life. He determined to give up his business as a teacher of rhetoric, though to avoid the appearance of precipitancy and any misconstruction of motives, he deferred carrying the resolve into effect until the vintage vacation, which was nigh at hand. He then frankly explained to his pupils his views and intentions; ad-

monished them in a friendly and Christian strain, and requested them to provide themselves with another teacher. His next care was to write to Ambrose, give him an account of his past obliquities and future designs, and solicit the assistance of that eminent saint in qualifying himself for baptism; and then, with a view to further preparation for this solemnity, he spent a few months in retirement at the house of his friend Verecundius. Nor must we forget to mention, that about this time he received the cheering news, that his old associate Nebridius, who had been carried away by one of the heresies of the age, had returned to a better mind; and, having for some time evidenced the sincerity of his faith by a consistent Christian deportment, expired in Africa, their native country, in the hope of the fruition of a happy immortality.

Having completed his term of preparation, Augustine, in company with Alypius, repaired to Milan, where the two friends gave in their names for baptism. The star of the church at Milan was now

in the ascendant, and pure and brilliant was the light of its golden candlestick. The sword of persecution had cut asunder the ties that bound the faith of its saints to the earth, and, with youth renewed like the eagle's, they were soaring aloft, on strong pinion, to gaze at the splendor of the Sun of Righteousness. The regeneration of the son of Monica added new fuel to the celestial flame; and Ambrose, as he better knew the illustrious convert, caught a glimpse of the future glory of Augustine. Night after night, like the wise virgins, they arose and trimmed their lamps in vigils and prayers. They sympathized in the passion of their suffering LORD; they followed him to Calvary; wept over his agony and death, and low in the dust breathed their solemn litany to the GOD of their salvation. At length, on the eve of Easter, in vestments of white, entering the church in slow procession, and with lighted tapers, the candidates surrounded the baptismal font, and pronounced the solemn vow which severed them from the world and bound them to heaven.

Imperial Cæsars! Proud philosophers! How, abashed, would ye have hung your heads had ye known that this band of worshippers, the object of your persecution and scorn, were giving birth to those seraphic strains in which the monarchs of a thousand generations were to celebrate their triumphs, and which to the end of time were to waft hallelujahs to the Most High TE DEUM LAUDAMUS!* And thou sainted mother! who then, rapt in ecstacy, wept over the consummation of thy hopes, couldst thou have looked through the vista of future years, and seen the light which the piety of thy son was destined to shed on the darkness of the Christian world, how wouldst thou have felt the efficacy of a mother's prayers!

Detached from his secular employments, and with nothing to detain him in Italy, the mind of Augustine naturally reverted to the place of his nativity, as the sphere where he might most acceptably to others,

* The reader is presumed to be aware of the tradition that the Te Deum was composed by St. Ambrose, and first sung at the baptism of St. Augustine.

and most gratefully to himself, devote his time to the study and diffusion of his faith. And the only earthly wish which Monica retained inclined her to the same destination. With the melancholy tenderness, which formed so lovely a trait in her character, she had caused, before she left Tagaste, a sepulchre to be prepared where her remains might repose by the side of her husband and kindred, in the bosom of her native earth. Providence too, had, at this time, thrown in their way Euodias, one of their townsmen, who had been recently regenerated, and the accounts which he gave them confirmed them in their resolution of revisiting Tagaste. Accordingly they left Rome and sailed down the river to Ostia, where they proposed spending a few days in preparation for their voyage. The intercourse which of late had been sweetened by religious sympathies, became more and more sublimated as they were charmed with the new beauties, awed with the new glories, and animated with the new hopes which the Spirit unfolds to the expansive vision of a pure and growing

faith. Once, in particular, as they sat at a window facing the east, and commanding a rich prospect around the mouth of the Tiber, the view of the rising sun transported their thoughts to the dawning of its glorious antitype on the morning of the resurrection. "We ascended," says Augustine, "above the noblest parts of the material creation, to the consideration of our own minds, and, passing above them, we attempted to reach heaven itself, and come to Him by whom all things were made. There our hearts were enamored, there we held fast the fruits of the Spirit, and returned to the sound of our own voice which gave us an emblem of the Divine Word. We said if a man should find the flesh, the imagination, and every tongue to be silent, and GOD alone should speak, not by any emblems of created things, but by himself, so that we could hear his word; 'should this be continued and other visions be withdrawn, and this alone seize and absorb the soul for ever; is not this the meaning of '*enter thou into the joy of thy* LORD.'" "At that

moment," he continues, "the world appeared to us of no value. My mother said to me, 'Son, I have now no delight in life. One thing only, your conversion, was an object for which I wished to live. This prayer my God has granted. What do I here?'" A friend reminded her of the regret which she had often expressed of leaving her body at a distance from her country. She fixed her eye on him as if in sorrow for his grovelling conceptions; and then, turning to her son with a look of dignified complacency, exclaimed, "Place this body any where. Nothing is far to God. He will know where to find me at the resurrection. My prayers are answered. What do I here?" The presentiment was verified. Within a few days she fell into a fever, and, after a brief illness, expired in the arms of her son.

CHAPTER V.

Retires in company with Alypius to Tagaste — Repairs to Hippo, where he is made Presbyter — The success of his ministry — Is appointed Bishop — Plan for the education of ministers — The Pelagian controversy — Some account of his writings.

THE conversion of Augustine was but the first-fruits of his mother's prayers. It was followed by a golden harvest of good works, the prospect of which though denied to Monica on earth is unfolded to her spiritual vision, and destined to be throughout eternity a chief source of her beatitude in a purer world. A rapid glance at these labors of love, and at the more obvious results that flowed from them, may still animate the pious mother to similar fervor and constancy of devotion, and may help to inspire the filial bosom with an adequate sense of the efficacy of a mother's prayers.

Augustine could not have been insensible to those mingled emotions of grief and joy, with which the demise of an eminent Christian seldom fails to affect

the surviving Christian relative. The stroke which had severed his mother from his mortal embrace released her, he knew, from prison, gifted her with the liberty for which she had long sighed, of a heavenly spirit, and removed a barrier to an indissoluble and more sublimated union in the joys of the LORD. But none realizes more than the newly-renovated Christian, that, in a world where so much evil exists, and consequently so much good may be done, the energies of life are too precious to be expended in feelings: and Augustine, having remained long enough at Ostia to pay the last offices of respect to his departed parent, embarked, in company with Alypius, for the scene of his future usefulness.

About four years had elapsed since he had quitted his native land. With what different feelings did he revisit it! He left it an ambitious and miserable worldling in quest of perishable riches, and of that honor which is the breath of human applause. He returned an humble and happy Christian, in possession of that godliness which is great gain, and of

that peace of God which passes all understanding. But no consciousness of pardon can wholly extinguish the workings of remorse. The remembrance of past sin is ever a bitter ingredient in the cup of present felicity. This Augustine felt as, on disembarking at Carthage, the deception which he had practised on the mother, whom he had now consigned to the tomb, was recalled vividly to his mind. The lips, which he would fain have heard pronounce his forgiveness, were sealed in death. What then could he do but look up to God, and exclaim in the words of the Psalmist, and with a deeper sense than ever of their import, *Against thee, thee only have I sinned!*

From Carthage, the two friends repaired to their native village Tagaste, and Augustine took up his abode on his father's estate. Here he spent nearly three years in retirement from the world. Devoting himself to prayer and meditation, and to the study of the oracles of God, he enriched his mind with those treasures of sacred lore, which were afterward so extensively blessed as the means of re-

suscitating and invigorating the Church of CHRIST. About the expiration of this time, an eminent citizen of Hippo, who was inquiring after the truth, being acquainted with the character of Augustine, invited him to his house, with the desire of receiving his counsels. Augustine accepted the invitation, not knowing that this was the road by which Providence was conducting him to the door which was to open on the field of his future labors. The Church at Hippo was then under the episcopal care of Valerius. Though a man of piety, yet for want of fluency in the Latin tongue, then fast superseding the vernacular, Valerius was in a great measure incompetent to the duties of his office: and the earnest desires of his people, coinciding with his own predilections, he was anxious to secure to his charge the services of Augustine. It is difficult to give those of the present day an adequate idea of the dread with which the assumption of ministerial responsibilities was then regarded. Chrysostom, who was born in the same year with Augustine, and Am-

brose, who but little preceded him, had even stooped to dishonorable artifices, to avoid being invested with the pastoral office: and Augustine, though possessed of clearer views of duty, yielded to the solicitations of Valerius and his people with great reluctance. During the ceremony of his ordination, he was observed to be greatly agitated, and unable to refrain from weeping. He afterward told Possidonius, that his tears were imputed to disappointment at not being ordained presbyter instead of bishop! "Such poor judges," says Milner, "are many of the views and sensations of godly men!"

The vigorous intellectual endowments of Augustine were softened by the amiable dispositions which were inherited by the son of Monica: and now that the whole man was brought under the sceptre of divine grace, he exhibited a rare example of that greatness, which, as Christianity has taught us, consists in humility. He was necessarily brought into collision with the errors of his age; but so free was he from the asperity of a controver-

sial spirit, that he made friends of his opponents and conciliated where he could not convince. "Heretics," says the historian, "vied with the members of the general Church in their attention to his pastoral labors." But controversy was only incidental and occasional. For the most part, he devoted himself, body and soul, to those humbler, and therefore in the Christian scale, greater duties of his office, which lie nearest the heart of an affectionate pastor. One of the most arduous and delicate of these duties, was the adjustment of differences; the Church of this age being mindful of the apostolic rebuke, "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?" His labors were extensively blessed. The Church at Hippo put on her robes of white, and exemplified the "admirable change," which the heavenly-minded Leighton so beautifully describes, "when CHRIST, after a kind of winter absence, returns to visit a declining Church; and all begins to flourish by his sweet influence; and his house, his worship,

and his people, are all clothed with a new beauty which is spiritual, and which none but a spiritual eye can discern."

The impulse which Augustine was the instrument of imparting to the Church at Hippo, communicated itself to the neighboring churches, and conveyed his fame throughout the western world. Valerius sympathized with his flock in their gratitude to God for so inestimable a gift; and, as the infirmities of advanced age increased his unfitness for his labors, he cheerfully acceded to the request that Augustine should be elected as his associate. The aged bishop himself was soon removed to a better world.* Augustine succeeded him, and long continued to discharge with zeal and fidelity, the duties of an office which he had shunned with protestations of reluctance, from which the character alike of the man and the age repel the suspicion of insin-

* In the character of Valerius, as in a few other points, the writer has preferred the account of Milner, although aware that it differs from that of some other historians. He takes this opportunity also to say, what he had intended to mention in his letter to the Committee, that the narrative has been chiefly compiled from the confessions of Augustine, as translated by Milner.

cerity. And thus devoted to the oversight of an extensive Church, which he had already been the means of purifying from error, and reviving from decay, Augustine, almost in the outset of his Christian career, illustrated the efficacy of a mother's prayers.

"The zeal and laboriousness of Augustine, increased with his authority:" and, severe as were his labors, the active spirit of his benevolence led him to originate and carry into operation, a plan which has since been repeatedly imitated and attended with the happiest results to the best interest of the Church. His previous acquaintance with the Manichees; the observations which his past life had qualified him to make on the arts of heresy and infidelity in general; and the enlightened and comprehensive views which he formed of the nature and diversified bearings of Christian truth, and of the injury which it sustains from advocates who have a "zeal of GOD, but not according to knowledge," impressed his mind with a deep sense of the want of a pious and efficient ministry. With a view

to a partial remedy of this evil, he projected and founded at Hippo, an institution for the education of those who desired to become preachers of the Gospel. Under his faithful and vigilant superintendence, this seminary continued to flourish: and of the number of laborers which it sent into the vineyard of the LORD, some idea may be formed from the fact, that Possidonius, his friend and biographer, was acquainted, as he tells us, with ten bishops who there laid the foundations of their theological knowledge. These ten, his biographer adds, founded other institutions, in their respective dioceses, on the model of Augustine's; each one of which became in turn a nucleus from which the radiance of "faith, hope, and charity," diverged to penetrate the darkness of a sinful world, and to illumine thousands of immortal spirits with the light of life and immortality. Had the mother of Augustine been a woman of ordinary Christian character, she would have given over in despair praying for her reckless son. But with Monica, "faith was the sub-

stance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen;" and in the germ of her simple faith all these blessings were contained. And when in the progress of events we behold the germ unfold, and gradually expand into the verdant and fruitful tree, how reasonable appears the simplicity of her faith! How delightful the illustration it offers to the Christian eye, of the efficacy of a mother's prayers!

Previously to the time of Augustine, the purity of the Catholic faith had been considerably vitiated. Origen and other eminent divines, led astray by "the lights of false science," had marred the simplicity and loveliness of the heaven-born truth, by torturing it into an unnatural alliance with the crude and barren conceits of heathen philosophy. In the time of Augustine, these wide-spreading corruptions concentrated themselves in the system of Pelagius, and thence breaking out afresh, raged with such virulence as to threaten the extinction of evangelical piety. To explain the peculiarities of this system would exceed the limits pre-

scribed to the present work. Under various aspects, it has existed in the Church from the time of its reputed founder to the present day; and the practical operation of it has ever been to accommodate Christianity to mankind, by inclining them to soften its precepts without surrendering its promises. Indeed it is the spirit of the world disguised under the mask of the Gospel. To detect its fallacies, repel its assaults, expose its tendencies, and crush its pretensions, required a mind of Herculean grasp, well versed in the Scriptures, and deeply convinced, not less by arguments in its defence, than by experience of its efficacy, of the truth of the doctrines whose interest was at stake. Such was the mind of the Bishop of Hippo. Its energies, naturally lofty and aspiring, had been subdued, as we have seen, by the sternest discipline, and cast down from the soarings of human pride, to seek for greatness in the depths of humility. His iron soul heated in the furnace of affliction, and wrought into conformity with his master's will, had experienced in an eminent de-

gree, "the baptism of the HOLY GHOST and of fire." In short, he had been specifically trained for the war which Pelagianism provoked. And wonderfully indeed did he acquit himself. The description of his labors in this department alone might fill a volume. He refuted his opponents in public counsels. He wrote voluminous treatises in refutation of their errors. He personally interposed to rescue many individuals from their snare. Regardless of the contempt and opposition of the worldly great, from whom the Gospel, as it shows them no favor, receives none in return, he carried home its truths, at once humbling and elevating, to the bosoms of the poor, to whom as they were originally offered, so they have ever proved congenial. Nay more, he restored to the doctrines of grace much of their original purity, discussing them with such clearness and fulness, that from his own time to that of the Reformation, his writings became in the words of the historian, "a great and useful light, indeed next to the word of GOD, the greatest means of grace which

the Church possessed." This work was to be done, and God qualified Augustine to do it. But when we glance at the numerous schools of philosophy, and contemplate the thousand master-spirits who were capable of controlling the destinies of their age, why, we naturally ask, should God have passed over all these and chosen for his work the son of an obscure woman in Tagaste? At this question, reason is dumb, or speaks only to betray her ignorance. But faith, with a confidence worthy of her heavenly origin, ascribes the election to the efficacy of a mother's prayers.

Augustine was one of the most voluminous of ancient writers. Besides the controversial works, to which we have already alluded, his Treatises on Faith and Works, on Christian Doctrine, on the Trinity, and several other important subjects, are celebrated. But the greatest of his works, is his City of God. At the end of the fourth century, the city of the world, as Rome may by way of eminence be termed, was falling to decay. The ignorant multitude, instigated by

their crafty leaders, attributed to the new religion the miseries which were the natural consequences of their vices and luxuries. To repel this odium, Augustine describes the city of the world, in contrast with the city of God; tracing to its legitimate causes the decay of the former, and unfolding the principles of the perpetuity of the latter. After rebutting the fertile objections which gave occasion to the work, the writer proceeds to demonstrate by an induction of pertinent facts, that the Pagan systems, tending to degrade the character, and offering nothing to avert or mitigate the calamities of life, afford no remedy either to moral or natural evil, and are consequently unfit to promote the temporal happiness of men; and from the jejuneness and absurdities of their philosophic theories, he infers their equal inadequacy to provide for their spiritual happiness. He then opens the mediatorial scheme, and shows how abundantly it supplies our moral destitution, and provides for the elevation of human character, and the consequent advancement of human

happiness. In this view are embraced the outlines of a system of theology: the origin of evil, the nature and consequences of the fall, the character and offices of CHRIST, and the authority of the Scriptures. He describes the progress of the city of GOD, through its various changes, from the time of Adam to the birth of CHRIST, and gives the coeval history of the city of the world: and, in conclusion, dwells on the issue of the two states. The work consists of twenty-two books, and though it contains much that is foreign to the taste of the present age, the reverence in which it was held for many ages may incline us to adopt the opinion of a competent judge, that "the City of GOD is one of the greatest efforts of genius and learning in any age." This and his other works were for ages, the great treasury of theological knowledge: to all of which, equally with his pulpit discourses, may be applied the words which we have selected as our motto—"Augustine would never have preached if his mother had not prayed."

CHAPTER VI.

His death — Conclusion.

To enter into any further detail with respect to the character and habits of Augustine, or the events of his life, is the province of his biographer. Our humble task is completed; and we must now bid adieu to the subject of our narrative. He died at Hippo, amid the horrors of a siege inflicted by the Vandals, who had invaded Africa, under the conduct of Genseric; and the closing scene of his long and laborious life seems the more tranquil and blissful, by contrast with outward tumult and misery. The blaze of momentary triumph was not to be expected from the substantial nature of his piety; but he enjoyed, in death, "the comfort of that reasonable, religious and holy hope," which, like a light arising out of darkness, shines forth from the shades of penitential abasement. "He used to say, that a Christian should never cease to *repent*, even to the hour of his

death. He had David's penitential psalms inscribed on the walls in his last sickness; and for ten days before he expired, he desired to be uninterrupted that he might give himself to devotion." He died in the 77th year of his age, after having been bishop or presbyter upward of forty years.

And now, my young friends, you have been presented with two opposite portraits of the same individual. The features of both are identical, the expression how different! In the one, you behold man as he has made himself; degraded and miserable. In the other, you behold man as he is the workmanship of GOD, created anew in CHRIST JESUS unto good works. The one, is the repulsive exhibition of moral ruin; the other, beams with the glories of the new creation. The former, in its leading features, is the picture of your soul by nature. It is for you to say, whether, to the same extent, you now resemble the latter? One of these opposite characters you must possess as long as you shall exist. This is the necessity of your nature, and

you cannot escape it. But which of the two it shall be, GOD has suspended on your choice. The blessing of the latter, it is his to give, but it is yours to pray for and accept. Which then will you choose? Will you tread the path which Augustine once trod, and which leads from partial perdition here, to total perdition hereafter; or will you follow him and all the saints of GOD in the bright career of benevolence, and be changed for ever into the divine image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the LORD?

The formation of your character, my young friends, and the determination of your final state, rests, under GOD, on yourselves. To secure your own happiness, may be safely proposed as your only motive. But in the course of this narrative, one inducement to a life of piety has been offered which must weigh much with every ingenuous mind. It is parental solicitude. Perhaps you are blessed with parents in whom this solicitude is enlightened by Scripture, and manifests itself in earnest prayers in your behalf, and in unwearied efforts to renew

your affections, and to form your conscience, and regulate your conduct by the truth of the Gospel. Will you frustrate their prayers? Will you resist their persuasions? Will you thwart their efforts? Their happiness is bound up in yours. Even if reckless of your own fate, will you hold the poisoned chalice to their lips?

And Christian mothers, shall the example of Monica be lost on you? With you are intrusted the best interests of the Church, and it is through your instrumentality that she must hope to realize her brightest visions. Nor is it among the least encouraging indications of the approach of a happier era, that the importance of your influence and responsibilities is beginning to be more worthily appreciated. It is as mothers that your sex is to repay the blessings which Christianity has conferred on it. Others may guide the stream of virtue, or stem the torrent of vice, but it is your peculiar province to purify the first springs of human action. You only can sow the seeds of truth, in soil as yet unoccupied

by the world. Your labors may not always be attended with precisely the result which you expect, but they cannot be in vain. Truth is imperishable. *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the word of* God *shall never pass away.* And thus in your silent and unobtrusive sphere, you may be sustained by the lofty consciousness, that in communicating the eternal and diffusive principles of truth and love to immortal minds, you are exacting an influence which can never fail; which like the secret but mighty energy of nature, will be known by its effects; and which, when the kingdoms and empires of the world have vanished; when the wisdom of senators, and the valor of warriors are forgotten, shall have lost nothing of its heavenly vigor, but actively as ever, shall

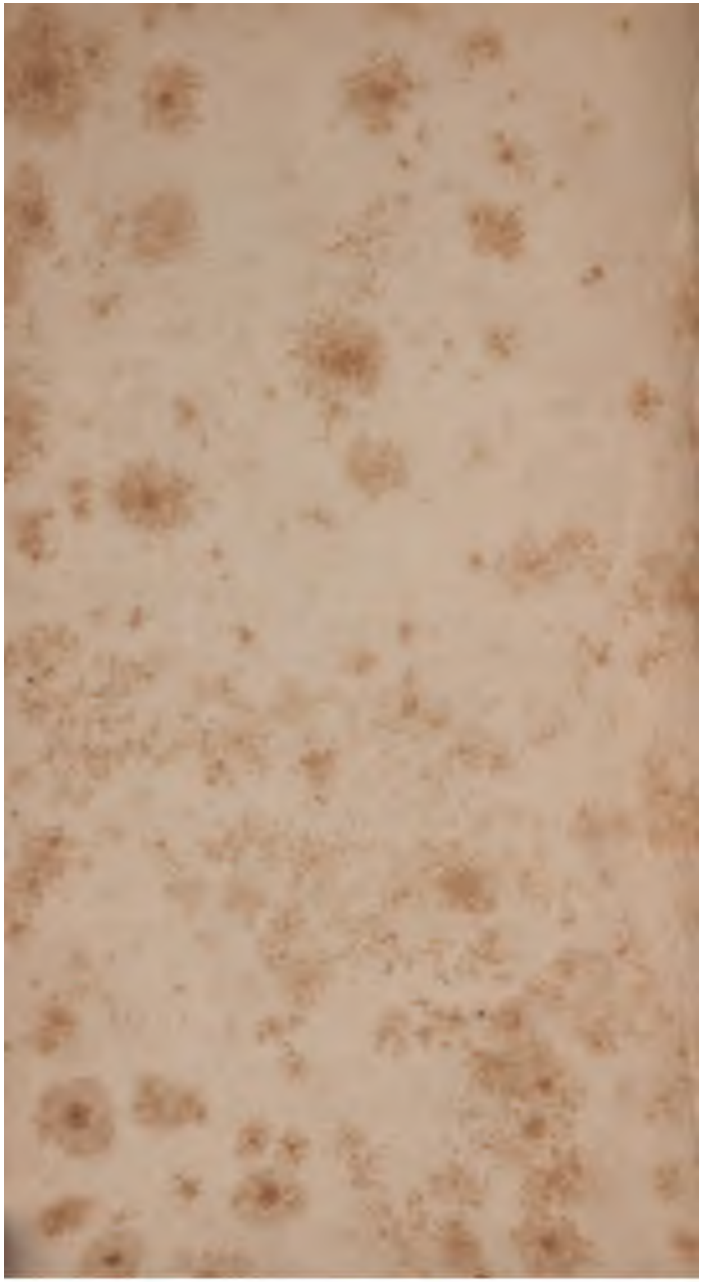
Spread undivided, operate unspent.

As co-workers with God, it must necessarily be that you cannot work in vain. But this general assurance of the efficacy of your labors, however it may [illegible] does not,

should not satisfy you. You wish to see your labors effectual to the entire conversion of your children. You wish to see them evidence that living faith which unites them to the mystical body of the Redeemer. This indeed constitutes the highest felicity of a Christian parent. But thus to crown your efforts with entire success; thus to give efficiency to the truth, is the special and exclusive prerogative of GOD. In the natural life we may calculate on results with a good degree of certainty. The end is sure to follow the means. And what is the consequence? Why, we rest in secondary causes; deny the providence, and even the existence of the Supreme, and worship nature in his stead. So it has been in the world, and so it would be in the Church, if the same uniformity visibly existed in the economy of grace, and the means were alike infallible to produce the specific and entire result to which they conduce. But in the spiritual world, GOD will not suffer his supremacy to be questioned. He will convince you that *your* labor in soil as yet unoccupied

sciousness of this truth will lead you to humble, fervent, and unceasing prayer. You will pray that the Spirit of GOD may breathe over the moral chaos, whose jarrying elements you would otherwise in vain endeavor to adjust and harmonize, and beautify it with the loveliness of the new creation. Prayer will thus be the anchor of your soul: it will repress presumption, and prevent despondency. Go on, then, teaching the truth in love, and, with the simple and persevering faith of Monica, imploring the blessing of GOD on your efforts, and you may safely leave it to the day of judgment, to reveal (as it alone can reveal) the full efficacy of a MOTHER'S PRAYERS!

THE END.



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